

VZCZCXRO3386  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #2813 2921233  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 191233Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5151  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002813

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2019

TAGS: KIRF PGOV PHUM SOCI IZ

SUBJECT: GOI REINFORCES COMMITMENT TO CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

Classified By: Acting DCM Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Over the past several months, the GOI has reinforced its commitment to Iraq's Christian community by inviting the Assyrian Church to relocate its headquarters back to Baghdad and by returning schools expropriated during the Saddam-era back to the Chaldean Church. At the same time, employment discrimination within the Ministry of Education has emerged as a concern for Iraq's Christian community, an indication that sectarian tendencies remain within some parts of the government. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶2. (C) On October 5, Pol M/C met with the Prime Minister's Advisor for Christian Affairs, Georges Bakooos, who stated that PM Maliki had sent an invitation to the head of the Assyrian Church, Mar Dinkha IV, to relocate the Patriarchial offices back to Baghdad from Chicago where they have been located since 1940. According to Bakooos, the PM has promised to provide the land and the money for the construction of the Assyrian Church headquarters and that the project plans are already in the works. Bakooos also stated that Maliki had met with the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, Cardinal Emmanuel Delly, on three separate occasions over the past year. Bakooos said that the Cardinal had asked the PM if the GOI could return seven schools in Baghdad and Kirkuk that had been run previously by the Chaldean Church, but had been taken by the government during the Saddam regime and made into public schools. Bakooos said that the PM had agreed to the request to return the churches (with the exception of one which had a mosque built near it and for which the church would receive compensation) and had ordered the Ministry of Education (MoE) to effect the transfer for the start of the following semester.

¶3. (C) While the school transfer appears to have been in the works for several months, it comes at a time when some Christian leaders have complained about discriminatory hiring practices at the MoE. On September 21, former Minister of Displacement and Migration Pascale Warda and her husband William Warda, who heads the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization, told Poloff that the MoE had recently hired 1580 new school teachers, but that only three of them were Christians. On September 28, Christian MP Ablahad Sawa told Poloff that the Minister of Education was an extremist who had failed to hire Christians for years despite receiving numerous applications from the community. On October 12, Poloff raised the issue with the Minister of Human Rights, Wijdan Selim, who also acknowledged that the Minister of Education was someone with whom the Christian community has had problems for a couple of years. Selim said that she had tried to raise the issue with him directly, but that he was "a hard person to speak with" due to his Islamist leanings. On the same day, Poloff raised the issue of hiring with Muntaha Alami, an advisor to the Minister of Education. Alami denied that there was discrimination in the hiring practices at the MoE and stated that Christians could teach any subject, with the exception of Islamic Studies.

FORD